

## **“A Heart Revealed, A Heart Poured Out”**

14 June 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

### **Welcome & Call to Worship:**

Well, good morning everybody and welcome to our service of worship. Psalm 46 has been my go-to psalm during the current crisis. It's lovely words of truth about God have really encouraged me and have given me stability at this time. So, *“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea”* (vv.1-2), picturing a catastrophe, such as an earthquake. And recently I have been thinking more about the ending of the psalm. In verse 10, the psalmist says, *“Be still and know that I am God.”* God is in control, God is loving, God is sovereign. He is just God! And so the psalmist tells us to take time to contemplate God, to increase our knowledge of Christ, to understand all that we have through the presence of the Holy Spirit. It's not passive, it's stillness, it's contemplation of the knowledge of God. And our first hymn is a contemporary invitation to do just that, to refresh ourselves in God, and it's title: *“Come Behold The Wondrous Mystery”*.

**Praise:** Come Behold The Wondrous Mystery

### **Prayers of Adoration and Confession:**

Let's continue to praise God this morning as we draw together as a church to pray.

Heavenly Father, Lord of heaven and earth, eternal, just and loving God, it is to You we pray this morning. Lord, You have created all things, from the far reaches of the galaxies, planets and constellations to the hairs on our head, our fingers and our toes, our ability to think, to speak and to touch. You are the God of the very, very big and the very, very small. You sit upon the throne of grace in heaven and You also walk beside us in our everyday lives. You have chosen us in love before the world began to be adopted into Your household and to share in the riches of heaven. And You still love us in this present moment with a love that has not diminished or changed in any way. Praise and glory to You, our God!

But even though we pray these things, Lord, we also confess that our lives, the things that we do and say, often do not line up with what we believe. Many times in our lives, our hearts are far from You. We are more concerned with our present worries than loving our God. We struggle to find time for You, Lord, even though we easily find time for entertainment, news and the latest trends. Our lives are often filled with worry, but our time spent in prayer is little. We know that You have sacrificed everything for us, but we struggle to find times in our busy life for You. And yet, Lord, when we return to the cross, when we look again at Your Son, Jesus, we know that we have a hope that can never fail. We know that when we trust completely in the resurrection of Jesus and live for Him, then we do not face condemnation or despair, because through Jesus You have overcome all things, even death itself. And so we pray: help us, Lord, through Your grace and mercy, to look again at the cross with renewed hearts and minds to trust completely in what Jesus has accomplished for us, so that when our neighbours see how we live, they will see not us, but Jesus. We pray all these things, not for our glory, but for the glory of Your holy name. Amen.

**Reading:** Ephesians 3:1-13

## Sermon:

So, thank you, Ezequiel. It's lovely to have you read for us today.

Some of you will know the name Howard Schultz, or his name will sound familiar. He is the former CEO of Starbucks and he has written a bestseller called *Pour Your Heart Into It*. In the book, Howard Schultz illustrates the principles that have shaped Starbucks phenomenon, sharing the wisdom he has gained from his quest to make great coffee part of the American experience. The success of Starbucks Coffee Company is one of the most amazing business stories in decades. What started as a single store in Seattle's waterfront has grown into the largest coffee chain on the planet. Just as remarkable as this incredible growth is the fact that Starbucks has "managed to maintain its renowned commitment to product excellence and employee satisfaction" - so says the website. You see, they had a vision and they made it a reality and they poured their hearts into it. And today, we're going to hear of the pioneer, so to speak, the founder of the Gentile church, and Paul is really excited about that. But before we hear his testimony, let's recap on the story so far.

So last time, we learned that the Church is the new humanity in a new community, where everyone in Christ are fellow citizens - that's the language of kingdom - and they are being joined together and built into a Holy Temple where God lives. The implications of that reality are exciting and a challenge. For example, as fellow citizens the Church cannot have division of race and nationalism. We should not speak of each other using labels; we should not frequent exclusively the ghettos of similarity. We must include, accept, and integrate each other as fellow citizens. This happens as we build on the foundation of the Scriptures and its cornerstone Jesus Christ. This is the beauty of the Church, a place where all nations are one Kingdom, a place where diversity is appreciated but unity in Christ is the foundation. "A place where God is quite at home," as The Message describes it, or as our translation says, "a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22).

And then Paul says, "for this reason" (Ch.3, v.1), and the reason is all he's just outlined in Ch.1 & 2! The truth of the gospel in Ch. 1, that they are chosen by God, redeemed by God in Christ through the cross, sealed by God through the Holy Spirit, saved and eternally secure. They are, in Ch. 2, a new humanity in a new community, the Church, and all of this absolutely thrilled him. He gets sidetracked by the immense privilege of being a recipient of God's grace, which he speaks about in v.2 and v.7 of Chapter 3. And having received the revelation of the mystery of the Church of God (vv.2-6) and of being a servant of that gospel, preaching "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (vv.7-12). Even as a prisoner he is not discouraged: "I am suffering for the truth of the gospel and its outworking in the Church, but I am doing so for your glory" he says in v.13. *You are worth it, you Gentiles are my family, my fellow citizens and I am a prisoner of Jesus Christ for your sake*. He loves these Gentile believers and he will defend them to the very end. So, he gets distracted and he speaks excitedly of himself and his ministry, and that's what we're going to look at today in this passage in Chapter 3.

### I. God's Grace Made The Mystery Known (vv.2-6)

So firstly, God's grace made the mystery known to him (vv.2-6). Paul, as most of you know, was previously known as Saul. He was a Pharisee, a very strict Jew, who hated the Church and gave approval to the stoning of one of its foremost church leaders, Stephen. However, he met Jesus on the road to Damascus; his life was turned around in repentance and faith. He was blind for three days and at that time both he and Ananias were told by God that he would be a minister to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; 26:17). And when asked to defend his ministry to the church in Galatia, which we read about in the letter to the Galatians (Ch.1:11-24), he says that he spent three years in

Arabia, most likely thinking through what God was calling him to do, wrestling with the Hebrew scriptures of the Old Testament, and coming to a firm conviction about what the gospel was and how it extended to the Gentiles. And that conclusion was worked out by himself with God and not from others, particularly other apostles and the church in Jerusalem.

That's what he's speaking of here in vv.2-6: *the mystery*, not as we think of a puzzle, but of something hidden that needs to be revealed and God alone can reveal what's in His own heart (1Cor 2:11-12). And I am always challenged by this type of investigation, this resolute determination of someone to understand, to wrestle in this instance with God, to read and understand the Scriptures and then to follow the truth because they've been convinced of what they've read. For Paul understood, from God, from the Scriptures of the Old Testament in which he was an expert, that the Gentiles were to be given the gospel and included as fellow citizens in the Church. He was prepared to go to prison and to die for that truth. And so in v.6, he summarises again the radical togetherness that the gospel achieves for those who were historically bitter enemies of the Jews. The Gentiles, he says in v.6, *are* - he's emphatic about it - they *are* in Christ: heirs together with Israel, they are members together of one body, they are sharers together in the promise. Paul is captivated and therefore excited by this truth. He pours his heart into it; he became a servant of the gospel, again, by the grace of God.

## II. God's Grace Gave Paul A Ministry (vv.7-12)

And secondly, we see that God's grace gave him a ministry (vv.7-12). It struck me afresh that Paul is in severe lockdown. He is chained to a Roman guard, under house arrest in Rome, and he remembers what he was called to do, and had been doing until the Jews had had enough of his anti-law and pro-Gentile message (as they saw it) when they had him arrested and put on trial. And you can read the fascinating journey from that arrest in Jerusalem to him coming to Rome in Acts 21-28. In that process, he spoke to the crowds of his accusers in Jerusalem and also to the Jewish authorities (the Sanhedrin); he addressed the centurion commanders who had to protect him as a Roman citizen; Felix, the governor of Judea; Festus, the next governor; King Agrippa and his Queen Bernice; the crew of the ship that was taking him to Rome that was grounded and wrecked in the storm on the island of Malta; to Publius, the chief official of the Malta island, and to the islanders themselves as he conducted a healing ministry and preached; and then to Rome, speaking to his jailers and to the Jewish leaders. And when Luke's account is written up in the Acts of the Apostles, he ends with Paul telling the Jewish leaders who would *not* listen to him, even after his repeated attempts to convince them, he says:

*<sup>28</sup> "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!" <sup>30</sup> For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. <sup>31</sup> He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ - with all boldness and without hindrance! (Acts 28:28-31)*

You see, Paul's ministry was to preach to the Gentiles "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (v.8). It was his passion and he poured his heart into it. He also made it plain to everyone, literally the word "plain" means to shine a light, to illuminate everyone to the administration of this mystery, by which he means the Church, as we see in v.10. So, he embarked on mission journeys, commended by the Church, starting in Acts 13. And he made three journeys with a team between AD 48-57, planting churches and pastoring them with visits, letters and prayers. And the Church was established locally in Asia and Europe. He wholeheartedly gave himself for God and the Church.

He was aware that the Church had made known the manifold wisdom of God to the unseen spiritual world (v.10). And for our Western minds, “the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms” is a strange idea, unbelievable even, and easily dismissed. But for Paul, it shows the extent of his vision. For him, it is a greater reality than the here and now, the seen, and it’s glorious in its expanse in heaven and eternity. This manifold wisdom of God - this is multifaceted, multicoloured like Joseph’s coat, that’s what the word means - is eternal, and it’s accomplished in Christ and succeeds in bringing us to God by faith. That’s what vv.11-12 are saying. And at its heart, it’s about a relationship with God now and into eternity in the new heaven and the new earth. And it’s for you and for your glory. That was the ministry that Paul was given. That’s what captivated him and that’s what he gave his life to. He literally poured his heart into it.

You see, Paul has been captured by Jesus, literally captivated by His grace. God opened His heart to him, revealing His plan for the world - that’s for the Jew and the Gentile, bringing them together in Christ - and God gave him the grace of the ministry of “preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ” (v.8). Yes, Paul has suffered for it, he is chained for it. He is under house arrest because the Jewish leaders did not like the message that abolished their law and said that their temple was no longer necessary, and as in Christ all had been fulfilled and the Church superseded everything with the inclusion of the Gentiles.

Paul says to us, the Church of Jesus Christ, “ You are worth suffering for. I am happy to defend the gospel and the Church against all who wish to tear it down and to stop the gospel being proclaimed, for your glory.” *For this reason!* Folks, let us be captivated by this vision, understand the grace of God in Christ, and see the gospel is about you being in relationship with God for eternity in heaven, and that is glorious. That is the great reason to give your heart and soul to Jesus as Paul did in response to the grace of the cross. Amen.

So, let us respond to God’s word by inviting the Holy Spirit, the living breath of God, to renew us in love and service within the Church, considering the grace shown to us in Christ. Let us sing, “Holy Spirit, Living Breath Of God”.

**Praise:** Holy Spirit, Living Breath Of God

### **Prayers for Others:**

Loving Father, what a privilege that, in Christ, we can come with boldness and confident access into Your presence, through faith in Jesus. We thank You that You invite us to come to You with all that is in our hearts and that You hear and answer our prayers according to Your good and perfect will.

We pray for our world, a world that is struggling with disease and suffering, pain and sorrow, intolerance and division. We know that Your Son, Jesus, died to reconcile hopeless, hostile people to You and to each other. We believe in the power of Your grace to change lives and to mend broken human relationships and we ask You to bring Your loving hand of peace and calm to the parts of the world where there is suffering from injustice and discrimination, from violence and senseless destruction of businesses and property as the protests on racism continue.

We pray for the countries affected by the latest huge locust swarm threatening the food security of some 40 million people in Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, India, Uganda, Pakistan, and southern Iran. We ask that You help and guide the governments of these countries as they try to deal with the swarms amid the threat of COVID-19. And as the virus continues to rampage through many parts of

the world, we pray that You would give the leaders of all nations true concern for the wellbeing of the people they are meant to serve.

We thank You for a decreasing number of COVID-19 cases in Ireland and for the news that nursing homes can begin to allow relatives to visit from next week. We pray that as our country moves forward in the reopening of services, shops and leisure pursuits that You will continue to sustain and protect all medical staff, nursing home workers, and first responders, especially those in our own congregation. We pray for continued wisdom for our elected officials as they lead us through this crisis and we ask You to guide their decisions as they continue to negotiate a programme to form a new government.

We pray for our own church family, thankful for the computer technology to enable home groups, church meetings, prayer and coffee times to take place, and for the untiring work of Sam, Katie, her brother Malcolm, Leopoldo and Marcos in producing the online Sunday services. As we move towards the next phase of easing restrictions, please help our elders as they figure out the safest way to reopen. Give them wisdom, courage and perseverance as they plan how we will get back to worshipping You together again. We also ask You to guide the decisions of all those involved in Sunflower Crèche as they make their plans for reopening whenever they feel it is safe and expedient to do so.

Lastly, we pray for all those we know and love who are in particular need because of ill-health, for those who mourn, and for those living with anxieties of all kinds. Lord, we are saddened to hear of the loss of our brother William Brereton. We give thanks to You for his enthusiasm for life. We thank You especially for those in this church, for good neighbours and for the medical professionals who cared for him through his illness and especially in his last days. Please comfort his family and friends – we will miss him.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for all Your many blessings, especially our fellowship of believers from all corners of the world here in ARPC. We ask that You will build us into a church that loves and cares for one another deeply regardless of background, culture, ethnicity or race so that we can demonstrate to a broken world the reconciling work of Jesus.

We place all these prayers and petitions in Your loving hands, in the name of Your dear Son and our wonderful Saviour, Jesus, amen.

**Closing Praise:** Hear The Call Of The Kingdom

**Benediction:**

We finish our service with these good words from Paul's prayer to the church in Ephesus:

*“Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” (Ephesians 3:20-21)*